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ABSTRACT

This address describes how one school district overcame the problems of too many students for the available classroom space and of insufficient funds to provide additional classrooms. In one school a year-round program for students in grades one through six was proposed and supported by parents and teachers. A school calendar was established that required students to attend school during four 9-week sessions and provided a 3-week vacation after each 9-week session. Teachers and other school personnel were allowed one day following each session to prepare for the next cycle of students. The calendar also observed the same holidays and vacations, September-May, that were observed by all other schools in the district. Some of the problems encountered in the program since its inception in July 1969 and the solutions thereto are presented and discussed. (MLF/Author)

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THE YEAR ROUND SCHOOL *

By: Wilma Cole, Principal
Becky-David Primary School

The Francis Howell School District is not unique in it's problem of having more students than classroom space and insufficient monies to provide necessary classrooms to house the rapidly growing student population. The method by which the district attempted to overcome the problem was somewhat unique.

The Francis Howell District is a large district in terms of land area and potential population, situated near suburban St. Louis in St. Charles County Missouri. The district is about thirty miles long and five miles wide with a population of about 16,000 persons.

The population is similar to that of most other fast growing areas, many young parents with two to three children with moderate incomes and the usual debts, interested in providing their children with the best education without excessive school taxes. The lack of industry in the district, other than farming and a few small privately owned businesses, places the burden of providing the school monies on the individual home owner.

Last year the expenditure per pupil in average daily attendance was $550.00.

The low tax valuation is a handicap in providing buildings since Missouri law limits bonding to ten percent of the valuation. It became apparent in the fall of 1968 that buildings could not be provided to take care of the ever-increasing enrollments under the existing nine month school term.

Year round schooling had been considered for the high school and junior high school but appeared to be impractical due to the small enrollment in those schools. Our thoughts since then indicate that this may have been an incorrect assumption. Individualization of instruction for advanced courses and other small classes would eliminate many of the previous objections to the year round program.

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John Anderson, then assistant principal of the junior high school, suggested the nine week-three year round school plan for students attending the Becky-David Elementary Schools.

The Becky-David Schools housed approximately 1,300 students in grades one through six with forty-eight classrooms. The school had been divided into primary and intermediate units with separate principals. It was decided that such a program could be successful and provide the necessary space to accommodate the growth in enrollment at the elementary level for a two year period.

In October of 1968 the administration and school board presented the problem of insufficient space to the teachers and parents with three suggested options:

1. Conversion of some wood frame surplus government buildings on the junior-senior high school campus to a sixth grade center.
2. Double sessions for students in grades six through twelve.
3. A year round program for students in grades one through six at the Becky-David Elementary Schools.

Conversion of the wood frame buildings would have been a temporary measure and involved moving the sixth graders to the junior-senior high campus, about ten miles farther from the major population center of the district.

Double sessions would also involve moving the sixth graders to the junior-senior high campus and due to the large area covered by the district force some students to leave home as early as 4:30 or 5:00 A.M. and others to arrive home about 8:00 or 8:30 P.M.

It was felt that the proposed year round school for students at Becky-David Schools would eliminate the transfer of sixth grade students and still provide for a good educational program and utilize the existing space to better advantage.

Group meetings were held with teachers and then parents to discuss the proposals and answer questions regarding the changes which would be involved in each of the options.

The teachers were more than willing to give the year round school a try. Very few objections were raised and much enthusiasm was exhibited towards the idea.

The group meetings were very well attended by the parents and patrons. It was found that several basic questions evolved during each of the meetings. Questionnaires with summaries of many of the questions and answers raised during the meetings were prepared and sent to each family in the Becky-David attendance area that would have a child enrolled in grades one thru six during the 1969-70 school term. Parents were asked to determine their family's preferance and return the attached form with their decision and comments. Approximately 85% of the families responded with over 60% of the responses favoring the year round school for Becky-David students.

The school board then directed the administration to prepare a detailed plan of operation for the year round school to be used on a one year trial basis at Becky-David Elementary Schools.

The attendance area was divided into four parts of approximately equal size and called Cycles A, B, C, and D. Consideration was given to the students ages, transportation routes and the areas of rapid population increase.

Almost all students had to be transported to school by bus, therefore the bus routes had to be nearly equal.

Growth areas were included in each cycle with some of the more stabilized areas. This was an attempt to equalize enrollment in each grade and also to eliminate the possibility of having all of the less advantaged students in any one cycle.

Student age was given prime consideration because of the need for equal or at least workable age or grade levels within each cycle and still permit all children from the same family to attend in the same cycle.

The school calendar was established with students attending school during basically four nine-week sessions with a three week vacation following each nine-week session. This permitted all students to have a vacation during each season

of the year. At least one day was included following each session for teachers and other school personnel to prepare for the next cycle of students. The calendar also provided for school to be closed on the same holidays and vacations during September - May when all other schools in the district were closed.

Missouri statutes require that 174 class days fall between July 1st and June 30th of the following year. Because of this it became necessary to divide one session of Cycle C and one session of cycle D into two parts of three and six weeks so as not to overlap into the next school year.

Parents were then provided with copies of the school calendar with the assigned attendance areas for each cycle. No opportunity was given anyone to change from one cycle to another unless they moved to another attendance area.

We would prefer to permit parents to select the cycle their students would attend, but were unable to do so because of the fact that lack of space was the motivating force in initiating the year round program in our district. The lack of space also prohibits students from attending school during their three week vacations for remedial or enrichment programs.

Teachers had the opportunity to select the teaching schedule which they preferred from the following possibilities:

1. Become a cycle teacher and teach the same group of students throughout the year with the same three week vacation periods as their students. This schedule included the same number of contracted days as other teachers within the school district. This schedule was recommended for teachers of primary students.
2. Elect to teach continuously throughout the year with one scheduled three week vacation. This meant teaching a different group of students each nine week session and extending the contract approximately forty-five days. The salary for this type of teacher was prorated on a daily basis.

3. Elect variations of the first two choices with fewer contracted days. The majority of the teachers in the Intermediate school chose to work continuously throughout the year with only one scheduled three week vacation. The majority of the primary teachers did however choose to teach the same schedule as their students. The speech, music, art and physical education teachers work with all students on a continuous teaching schedule. This is also true of the special education classes for mentally retarded and students with learning disabilities.

The program has been in operation since July 1, 1969 at Becky-David and will be put in operation at Central Elementary July 1, 1971.

During the first year the program was evaluated through a study paid for by the Danforth Foundation. Copies of the evaluation and descriptions of the program are available for you to take with you. Additional materials are available for purchase from the district and are listed on the last page of the report.

As might be expected, several problems occurred which had not been anticipated. Most of the problems concerned communication and scheduling intracacies. They were not insurmountable. The program does necessitate duplication of some meetings, especially when involving the total faculty or community, but also eliminates the need for others, such as the orientation programs for returning teachers at the beginning of the school year It also causes everyone to re-evaluate many practices that have been established as necessary.

Teachers accustomed to having the same room for the year or several years must move as many as four or five times during the course of the year. Some provision must be made for the storage of materials and supplies of students and teachers during their three week vacation periods.

Teachers tend to accumulate a world of materials and aids over the months and years of teaching and save much of this for future use. They also tend to assume ownership for room supplies and sometimes dislike having to share supplies and equipment with other teachers within the building.

We have found that much of what has been saved and reused is being discarded unless it is actually needed. Most of the teacher-made materials were designed for the particular needs of a group of students. Teachers more aware of supplies and materials located in one room make better and more extensive use of those materials and are more willing to share materials and ideas with other teachers. This certainly adds to the resources of the teacher and school.

Principals accustomed to having the one or two months during the summer to evaluate the years program, prepare schedules, and make plans for the coming year, find they no longer have the time available when students and teachers are not present. Also there is no longer an end of the year inventory with a two-three month period to order textbooks and other materials for use during the next year.

When faced with this knowledge that the principal will no longer have the summer free from students and teachers it becomes even more important to make provisions for the continuous evaluation and planning of the school program. It becomes easier through necessity to delegate and assign to other personnel those tasks not requiring the principals special attention or training. Though we might not like to admit it the evaluation and planning of programs do effect our community and faculty and can be more effective when others have been involved. How many times have you wished you could confer with a part of your faculty or community regarding some phase of your school program or share your thoughts and ideas with them only to find it impossible because the time was summer and no one was around except the secretary or custodian? Perhaps this is one reason the secretary and custodians are often more aware of what is happening in the school than are the teachers. Teachers appreciate being involved in such planning and discussions and a majority of them are always available on the year round program.

It's very rewarding to see students as well as teachers anxious to return to school and resume their work. Review sessions are seldom necessary except

in relation to the regular days lesson from the previous day or lesson.

Discipline has become a smaller problem, perhaps because the child doesn't have such a long session without a break to do what he wants -- or perhaps it's because we don't see the same faces in the office and classroom. Sometimes it's a relief to know that some of the problems will be away from the building for a few weeks. Attitudes do change, not only the students', but also those of the staff and principal.

Our major problem with the acceptance of the year round program nas been caused by the junior-senior high school's traditional nine month schedule. This means that families with students in both the elementary and the secondary schools are on both schedules and have more difficulty in planning vacations. This may be corrected within the next few years as plans are being made to extend the schedule to the secondary schools.

Another problem of major concern has been the effects on students from the change in teachers each nine weeks. The actual effects have been impossible to determine but we believe the nine week-three week schedule has been more effective and we have decided to eliminate the option for continuous teaching at Becky-David Primary School and at Central School. Becky-David Intermediate School will have some departmentalization and all teachers will be teaching continuously with only one three week vacation scheduled. Teachers will teach groups from all in-session cycles each day and will thereby have the same students throughout the year.

In summary, the year round school as described here was initiated as the result of a need in <u>this</u> school district. In my opinion, it has been very successful. The first year was a difficult year requiring many adjustments from all involved. Last year I was certainly displeased with the program and believed we should perhaps revert back to the nine month school year when and if it became possible. However, as you may have guessed by now I am fully convinced that this program is the best for our particular community's schools and definitely lends itself to the

continuous progress of our students. It is in total agreement with the continuous progress philosophy and assists in breaking down the lock-step barriers of the graded school.

The Danforth Foundation has been very helpful in providing the funds to evaluate the program, publish the report, and conduct parent-teacher seminars. Without their assistance, the information about our program could not have been provided. There has been much interest in the program at both the local and national levels.

I also believe the willingness of our superintendent and school board members in taking such a bold step was very commendable.

Split or double sessions would have been much easier to initiate and operate, but in my opinion not nearly so good for our students.

The program has need for improvement and is not as flexible as we would like, but for the present it appears to be serving our needs without hindering the progress of our students.